'Bad luck' bills gear for Bicentennial bow

By Roger Boye

A $2 BILL MEANT moral decay to many superstitious Americans in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In the late 1800s, a $2 bill represented what a candidate would have to pay to buy a vote, or what a lady of the night would charge for one evening. The bill also was used for gambling.

To many persons, receiving a $2 bill in circulation foretold of certain bad luck.

Secretary William Simon and others at the United States Department of the Treasury are hoping the American public is no longer superstitious about its money. On next April 13, Thomas Jefferson's birthday, the treasury will place 225 million $2 bills in circulation and will put another 175 million in circulation by July 4. The release of the $2 bill should rank as the top numismatic event in 1976.

The $2 bill was discontinued in 1966 because of a lack of demand. Many department experts say that was a result of the fact that only 6 million $2 bills were produced annually, not because of any superstitious tales held over from the turn of the century.

By producing 400 million $2 bills annually, the treasury department hopes the bill will be used widely and become a permanent part of the nation's currency system. If it does, the treasury will make only half as many $1 bills, saving about $5 million a year.

The last $2 bill printed was the 1963 A U. S. Note with Thomas Jefferson on the front side and Monticello on the back. The new bill will retain the same basic design on the front side.

The reverse, however, will show a rendition of John Trumbull's painting, "The Signing of the Declaration of Independence," rather than Monticello.

It will likely be several years before the new $2 bills attain a collectors' value. With 400 million to be issued annually, there will be plenty of bills available to satisfy collector demand.

In other words, it would be unwise to hoard great numbers of the new $2 bills in hopes of selling them at profit to a dealer in a year or two.